

## Trading Up with the Trades

My name is Noah Lawrence and I am the energy efficiency expert for my company, Foster Lawrence Enterprises LLC. To begin, I would like to say that the point of this essay is not to discredit college or the value that it brings. But rather, voice my opinion on how we can, as a society, change the way we think about trades and how they are presented to the younger generations.

I attended high school between 2009 and 2013. Like most students of that time, my life was focused on getting into the perfect college program that would bring me success and happiness. I had whole-heartedly bought into the idea that college was the only pathway to success. With the very persistent recommendation of my family, teachers, guidance counselors and peers, I received an associate degree and a bachelor's degree. I thought that as I progressed through college, I would find the perfect job and career path for me. At this point, I had not given any consideration to a trade.

The turning point for me happened in my senior year of college when I was given an assignment to research the impact of any energy law or policy. Being from New York State, I decided to research the state programs supporting the clean energy industry. I was amazed by how many different sectors and trades were involved in the missions that the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) had been tasked with developing. Discovering the role that energy efficiency must play in solving the climate issues that we face is what inspired me to pursue a career as a home performance professional. Being able to help countless families make their homes more comfortable, affordable and healthy has been a pretty big bonus.

My family has a history in the trades. Most of my uncles currently work in the trades and my brother had taken that path from the age of 16. Before I graduated college, my brother joined with another contractor to form Foster Lawrence Enterprises LLC, a new home performance contractor for the rural areas in Upstate, NY. I got my certifications as a building analyst and envelope professional through the Building Performance Institute shortly after college and joined my brother's business.

I wish that my story was a rare one, but it is not. A student who was pushed into more schooling instead of being told about the wide range of options available to them. Some students find out too late that they are not suited for college. I can't count how many friends I had that went to school, went into debt, just to leave school without a degree, then followed a path that was never shown to them in high school.

Some students would be perfect for going into the trades, the student who loves math but can't sit still in class or the student who loves talking about science but hates writing essays. College is not meant for everyone; our doctors and engineers need plumbers and electricians and vice versa. Parents and everyone involved in educating the next generation, please teach our students that trades are just as important as going to college. College will always be there later if they decide to take that path. My experience has been that those who have taken a break and gone back to school are more motivated and passionate students than those who have been in school for their entire life.

I am thankful for the opportunities I have had and where they have led me. My hope for this story is to change the way others may think about college. Please reconsider how you talk to your kids about what they want to pursue after high school. Support your local trade schools and talk to your guidance counselors to make sure they aren't only guiding students toward college. Eventually we will reach a balance between trades and colleges based on mutual respect and a desire to create a healthier society.